

The Glitter and the Glory

by John Fischer

The sermon distinguishes between the superficial and fabricated glory of human achievement and the true radiance of God's character and presence.

Scripture: Exodus 34:29, Romans 8:29, 2 Corinthians 3:7, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Philippians 2:15, 1 Peter 4:14

Topics: "Gods Glory", "Christian Living"

Description

John Fischer preaches about the distinction between the glitter of popular culture and the real glory of God, emphasizing the danger of confusing the two. He highlights how the media has influenced Christianity's popularity, leading to a shift in perception of what it means to be a Christian. Fischer draws parallels between the fading glory of Moses, representing human effort and performance under the Law, and the surpassing glory of the Spirit, which brings grace, forgiveness, and power for Christian living.

Transcript

Hardly any other aspect of Christianity is more affected by the proliferation of popular appearances and images than our concept of glory. Glory used to be strictly a spiritual term, associated with the radiance of the character and presence of God and His heaven. Old Testament revelations of the glory of God sent prophets, as well as holy men and women, scurrying for cover.

Today, glory is more commonly associated with popularity and fame. Stars that shine in our culture are found on small fluorescent screens in gloomy living rooms, not outside in the expanse of the night sky. Our heroes are bigger than life, bolstered by special effects, resilient stunt people, and perfect camera angles.

The presence of television in every home makes it possible for millions to focus on only a few. This media attention, though powerful in its ability to homogenize widely held cultural values, is a far cry from displaying any idea of real glory; instead, it is mere glitter. It is a fabrication of the human image and we all,

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whether we realize it or not, fall down and worship in one way or another.

Popular Christianity has bought into the glitter. Indeed, it is largely the media that has made Christianity popular. Twenty-five years ago it was not popular to be a Christian. Now, being born again could get a person elected to public office. Christian TV, Christian music, Christian political coalitions, and a conservative wave of public opinion have all converged to bring this about. Whether it's good or bad,

Christians are getting more publicity today.

But is this always the kind of publicity we want? Can glitter be used to advance the kingdom of God? When we broadcast our story, is it real, or is it just as fabricated as the soap opera on the next channel? The power of TV is also its greatest temptation: the power to create an imaginary reality that becomes the shared experience of millions. The temptation is to make that reality more than real, more what we want it to be than what it is. Christians have succumbed to this temptation as much as anyone -- maybe more.

Therefore, the task at hand is to learn how not to confuse our culture's glitter with real glory. This is no easy task, but gaining an understanding of what real glory is would be a good beginning. The Apostle Paul carefully delineated differences in glory that surprisingly foreshadow the same confusion we experience between glitter and glory: "Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone [the Law], came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?" (2 Cor. 3:7,8).

He is speaking of two different ministries and the corresponding glory attached to each. The first thing to notice is that Paul is comparing ministries. His distinction is subtle, not between good guys and bad guys, but between good guys and good guys. Moses was certainly a man of God seeking to do the best he could, but the glory attached to his activity somehow falls short of what the Spirit has planned for us.

Upon more careful examination, Moses' glory typifies the glitter of our present culture. Moses exemplifies the Law and all that the Law embraces: perfection, self-effort, and performance.

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The Law leads to frustration and guilt, and always ends in death; because the Law is perfect, no one can fully obey it. But the Spirit brings us grace, forgiveness, power, and adequacy for the very life we are required to live.

When we look at it this way, the path of obedience to the Law, with such a depressing array of qualities, appears to have no chance at all. But it does because it still has a glory attached to it. It's the same glitter that fools people today.

Let's face it, the glory of Moses' face must have been quite impressive. He could have given Michael Jackson a real run for his money even without a television camera, a light show, or a glittering glove! In fact, his face was so bright that people couldn't even look steadily at it, just as we can't stare at the sun for any length of time without damaging our eyes.

This kind of glory easily fools us. How quickly we attribute a radiant personality or great charisma to the presence of God. But in Moses' case it wasn't the present presence of God; it was the past presence: leftover glory. And because it was leftover, Paul said it was fading.

This kind of glory always starts big and then fizzles. It begins with God but ends with us. The brilliance of Moses' face was real glory from being with the real God, but it faded because he had to leave God on the mountain and trust in human sufficiency, his own and Israel's, to keep it going.

How often do we start with big plans, only to leave God on the mountain? Even the greatest vision from God can fade when we take our trust from Him and focus it in ourselves: our own talent, our own personality, or our own experience.

Paul says there is a glory more glorious than this fading glitter. It eclipses the brightness of Moses' face or the glory of any magazine-cover face. It's a glory that comes from the ministry of the Spirit in us. The Spirit knows we are destined to shine brighter than the sun in our glorified bodies, so He is in no hurry to put on a light show now. He is content to operate on the quiet level of changing our lives. He has a long-term commitment to working the character of God into our lives on a daily basis.

Glory on a human level starts big and fades like the face of Moses. It relies heavily on images of success that can be fabricated and sold in the media-oriented world. But glory of the Spirit starts small, hardly noticeable, and grows steadily from

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one degree of glory to another. Day by day we become more like Him.

The Spirit's glory is not activated by a spotlight. People with the confidence of the Spirit in their lives can walk with ease in all situations, knowing that the glory of God will always be seen in them, sometimes even in spite of them.

This glory does not come and go on demand. It's either there or not there. We have either the fading glitter of our own human effort or the increasing glory of the character of God being built into our lives.

All that glitters is not gold.

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